Nontraditional Employment and Training

The Perkins Act and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) brought major changes to the arena of nontraditional employment and training ("Gender Equity" 1999; "WIA and Perkins" 2001). Perkins eliminated set-asides for displaced homemakers, single parents, and single pregnant women, but mandated increased enrollment in high-wage nontraditional training. With the WIA, the Nontraditional Employment for Women Act was repealed, but some WIA provisions require a focus on nontraditional occupations (NTOs). Programs aimed at strengthening the self-sufficiency of female welfare recipients are also emphasizing NTOs, which tend to offer higher wages than female-dominated occupations ("Nontraditional Employment for Women" 2001; NOW 1999).

However, despite 20+ years of equity legislation and programming, many barriers remain. Recent research findings show that early nontraditional experiences can have a lasting impact on women’s career directions (Hensley 2000), experiences in technical or hands-on activities increase career-related confidence and self-efficacy (Betz and Schifano 2000), and the way in which nontraditional careers are advertised and perceived by the public has a significant influence on who pursues those opportunities (Miller et al. 2000). Although most NTO programming is aimed at women and girls, a significant recent thrust focuses on how males are affected by stereotypes in occupations nontraditional for their gender (Flood et al. 2000; Henson and Rogers 2001; Meadus 2000; Thurtle et al. 1998).

Encouraging minorities to pursue careers in which they have historically been underrepresented is also being emphasized (Brown 2001; Doverspike et al. 2000; Hargrow and Hendricks 2001).

The resources here provide more information on what is needed to improve participation in NTOs, including attention to the classroom environment, retention after recruitment, and cultural change.


Women often have lower levels of measured interest and self-efficacy or confidence in “Realistic” careers involving technical, outdoor, or “hands-on” activities, the kinds of skills often taught in high school “shop,” electronics, and trades courses or under the tutelage of a parent comfortable with home and auto repair. Interventions that increase their confidence and interest in these career pursuits can be effective.

Brown, B. L. Women and Minorities in High-Tech Careers. ERIC Digest No. 226. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, the Ohio State University, 2001. (ED 452 367) ericacve.org/digests.asp

Many of the barriers to science, mathematics, engineering, and technology careers may be overcome by effective school practices. Eliminating or reducing the social and educational factors that have created barriers to high-tech careers can help educators to move new generations of female and minority students into the high-tech careers in which they have been underrepresented.


Comparing the 1998 Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act and the 1990 act in terms of key gender equity provisions that are most critical to local school districts. Outlines implications for vocational educators serving single parents, displaced homemakers, and individuals entering nontraditional training and employment.


Provides an overview of African American career choice and what it means to be an African American man or woman in a nontraditional career field. Career-counseling strategies and interventions to consider when counseling African Americans in (or for) nontraditional career fields are described.


A study of eight older adult women who shared a unique, nontraditional work experience during their late adolescence and young adulthood found that this experience had a pivotal impact on subsequent life decisions, especially about education and career.


Male clerical temporary jobs, like other men who do nontraditional work, face institutionalized challenges to their sense of masculinity. Paradoxically, rather than disrupting the gender order, the gender strategies used by these male clerical temporaries help to reproduce the gendered organization of work.


Meadus, R. J. “Men in Nursing: Barriers to Recruitment.” Nursing Forum 35, no. 3 (July-September 2000): 5-12.

Men still constitute a small minority of the nursing population. Although the literature has identified barriers that deter men from
entering the profession, nursing schools and other stakeholders have been conservative in their efforts to recruit men.


Even if women overcome negative perceptions of computer-related jobs, studies of children and computers and of college students’ responses to mock job ads indicate that abilities and traits for technology jobs may be associated more with one gender than the other. This may influence career choices in gender typical or atypical areas.


Includes participant workbooks on awareness, recruitment, retention, and placement; an awareness video; and a CD-ROM with supplemental materials to assist educators in developing strategies for increasing awareness, recruiting, retaining, and placing students in nontraditional occupations.


Addresses nontraditional employment as one of the six self-sufficiency strategies. Explains what it is and why it works, approaches, and resources.


Intended to help advocates for low-income women find out what works in nontraditional employment training and placement programs; advocate for more NTOs for low-income women; build coalitions to expand nontraditional opportunities; and educate the public about the ways in which nontraditional employment can help low-income women achieve economic stability.


Documents the efforts of Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute’s Trades and Service Occupations Department to recruit and support women in nontraditional occupations, including gender and diversity training for faculty and staff, sexual harassment training, a support group for women students in nontraditional fields, support services such as childcare, and employment strategies.


Describes activities to infuse gender equity in secondary education: (1) 1-day gender equity conferences and workshops for females; (2) summer programs; (3) after-school programs and clubs; (4) parent-daughter events; (5) field trips to science and technology companies and community technical colleges; (6) world of technology programs; (7) career fairs or career days; (8) contacts with employers; and (9) career activities in the classroom.


A study of 12 women who have taken technological career paths and excelled in their fields showed that they attributed their success in a mathematical, scientific, or technological profession to awareness of and interest in technical fields, encouragement of self-esteem, and encouragement of cognitive growth. Activities promoting development of critical thinking, reflective thinking, teamwork, question asking, and risk taking should be infused into girls’ learning and play.


A survey of Year 12 Australian students in coed private, coed public, and all-female schools revealed a relationship between gender role identity and traditional/nontraditional career choices. Occupations were more gender neutral, but blue- and pink-collar jobs remain stereotyped. Type of school did not influence girls’ career attitudes or aspirations.


Interviews with 10 men studying early childhood education and 8 women in motor-vehicle engineering, areas in which they were gender minorities, revealed intimidating behaviors and stereotypes preventing their full participation. Difficulties also arose in workshops and job placements.


NTOs tend to offer higher wages than many of the occupations where women are in the majority. Engineers, architects, police and detectives, electrical and electronic technicians and technologists are examples of nontraditional occupations that are expected to exhibit fast growth and/or create a large number of jobs. All have median weekly earnings higher than the average for all wage and salary workers who usually work full time.


Presents six primary tools employers can use to narrow or eliminate pay gaps in their workplaces: evaluate your compensation system; establish effective recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices; address diversity; have a system to ensure accountability; and websites that offer information and technical assistance.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Trends and Issues Alerts may be freely reproduced and are available at http://cete.org/acve/tia.asp.